Customer Case Study

Real Estate Services Provider Simplifies Data Center

Executive Summary

Customer Name: Cassidy Turley
Industry: Real Estate
Location: St. Louis, Missouri
Number of Employees: 3500

Challenge:

- Standardize legacy data center equipment from nine initial companies and several acquisitions
- Eliminate latency experienced with business-critical applications
- Enhance performance, scalability, and reliability of data center through consolidation

Solution:

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) supports VMware server virtualization
- Cisco Nexus 5000 Series Switches enable 10-Gigabit connectivity and simplify provisioning
- Cisco collaboration solutions boost communication, easing load on Microsoft Exchange

Results:

- Consolidated equipment from several locations into a single Cisco UCS-based data center
- Improved application performance by 100 percent
- Reduced costs by 75 percent by saving on hardware, power, cooling, and heating expenses

Cassidy Turley consolidates data center with Cisco Unified Computing System and prepares for future growth.

Challenge

In March of 2010, nine real estate firms joined forces to form Cassidy Turley. Today, the company earns more than US$22 billion in revenue and is a leading provider of commercial real estate services for owners, investors, and occupiers. Based in St. Louis, Missouri, Cassidy Turley has more than 3500 employees in over 60 offices throughout the United States and manages over 450 million square feet of space. The firm was recognized by the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals (IAOP) as one of the top 75 "Leader" companies on its 2012 Global Outsourcing 100 service providers list.

As the company began to evolve shortly after its launch, Cassidy Turley created a five-year plus technology vision, which included replacing older, legacy servers that came from its original companies and subsequent acquisitions. "We have office locations all over the country, and we continue to grow," says Steve Deal, senior network engineer at Cassidy Turley. "To improve performance, scalability, and reliability of our data center, our goal was to consolidate and build a private cloud." The vision also included upgrading telephone and voicemail systems with a single integrated interface, a call center management solution that provided instant messaging, and integrated audio/video/web conferencing.

Deal and senior network engineer Tom Kriegermeier were responsible for the design and execution of the plan. "We inventoried the equipment from all the companies and knew we had to reduce the huge footprint of hardware from various vendors. We also had a bandwidth bottleneck that caused latency issues," says Kriegermeier. The latency was apparent on Microsoft Exchange 2007, and with a planned upgrade to Exchange 2010 as well as to PeopleSoft ERP, the team knew performance would be a challenge.

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"When we were running Exchange 2007 on our old hardware, the performance was just ungodly slow. . . . But with Exchange 2010 running on Cisco UCS, we've seen a total turnaround in performance, with very few mail-related issues."

– Randy Toler
Systems Manager
Cassidy Turley

Solution

To address these issues, Deal and Kriegermeier created a comprehensive business case with the help of Alexander Open Solutions, a Cisco partner, and the local Cisco office. The plan called for standardizing on the Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS®) in a data center in Denver. "If you want state-of-the-art, you want to go with top of the line, which for us was Cisco," says Deal.

The team mapped out a new data center design that includes Cisco® UCS B200, B230, and B250 Blade Servers, as well as Cisco UCS C200 Rack-Mount Servers. Together with VMware virtualization technology, the infrastructure supports 94 virtual servers on two UCS chasses. The firm also deployed Cisco Nexus® 5500 Series Switches for 10-Gigabit Ethernet connectivity, along with Cisco Nexus 2000 Series Fabric Extenders. "The Nexus series was built for data centers, with more horsepower and easy provisioning," says Kriegermeier.

Thus, Cassidy Turley moved a number of business-critical applications onto Cisco UCS, including Microsoft Exchange and SQL Server, PeopleSoft ERP, as well as industry-specific solutions such as Yardi property management software and Reflex Enterprise financial software. The data center also supports more than 1000 voice-over-IP phones using Cisco Unified Communications Manager, Cisco Unity® Connection, and Cisco Unified Contact Center Express. Additional Cisco collaboration solutions, such as Cisco TelePresence® and Cisco Jabber™, help improve productivity while reducing the load of its more than 3000 Exchange mailboxes.

Results

Since deploying Cisco UCS, both Cassidy Turley's users and IT staff have seen a notable improvement in its email system. "When we were running Exchange 2007 on our old hardware, the performance was just ungodly slow," says Randy Toler, systems manager at Cassidy Turley. "Users were constantly rebooting mail stores. But with Exchange 2010 running on Cisco UCS, we've seen a total turnaround in performance, with very few mail-related issues. Life is just much easier now."

With only two chasses running nearly 100 servers, the company sees a significant saving in hardware costs, as well as associated power, cooling, heating, and management costs. "We estimate the savings from the Cisco deployment to be approximately 75 percent," says Kriegermeier. "The ROI is measured in months, not years, as we continue to expand our UCS chassis deployment to include more blades and new chassis."

Yet at its core, the new data center expansion was always about improving the experience for Cassidy Turley's users. Says Deal, "We designed everything to be centralized in Denver, so that users can go anywhere in the country, whether they're at home or in the office, and still be able to access the applications they need. The goal is to give them a seamless user experience no matter what the situation."

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Product List

Data Center Solutions

- Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)
  - Cisco UCS B200, B230, B250 Blade Servers
  - Cisco UCS C200 General-Purpose Rack-Mount Servers

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Nexus 5000 Series Switches
- Cisco Nexus 2000 Series Switches
- Cisco 890 Series Integrated Services Routers

Applications

- Microsoft: Exchange, SQL Servers
- VMware
- PeopleSoft ERP
- Yardi
- Reflex Enterprise

Storage

- NetApp

Security

- Cisco IronPort®

Collaboration Solutions

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Cisco Unity Connection
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express
- Cisco Jabber
- Cisco TelePresence

Next Steps

In addition to expanding its Denver data center, Cassidy Turley plans to build a backup and disaster recovery data center in Texas. "As we acquire more companies, we're going to deploy Cisco Nexus 7000 switches in our Denver data center to extend our unified fabric approach," says Deal. Other plans on the horizon include the implementation of Fibre Channel over Ethernet (FCoE) using its Cisco Nexus switches, a VMware View desktop virtualization deployment, as well as a strong push to deploy Cisco wireless devices.

For More Information

- To find out more about Cisco Unified Computing, visit: www.cisco.com/go/ucs.
- To find out more about Cisco Nexus Switches, visit: www.cisco.com/go/nexus.

This customer story is based on information provided by Cassidy Turley and describes how that particular organization benefits from the deployment of Cisco products. Many factors may have contributed to the results and benefits described; Cisco does not guarantee comparable results elsewhere.

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